

# Bringing schools and funds together



The Tender Bridge has been developed by ACER to help schools find relevant learning-related funds.

**Michelle Anderson** describes this new service.



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School leaders have told ACER that they need access to comprehensive, easy-to-understand, education-specific information on what funding is available and how to apply for it. Funders have told ACER that they are looking for applicants who are a good fit with their values and priorities, and who meet their stated eligibility requirements.

The Tender Bridge is a new national service to help bring schools and learning-related funds together more effectively.

Research in schools around Australia revealed that many educators did not have the time, knowledge or skills to effectively search for, apply for, implement, and report on accountabilities around funding for special projects in their schools.

Many educators had great ideas for improving the learning conditions for students but they had less knowledge

in how to fund an idea, where to look to identify suitable funding options and what was required to secure and use the funds effectively.

The Tender Bridge is a comprehensive, searchable database of different funding opportunities that schools, or schools in partnership with others, are eligible to apply for. The database spans philanthropic, business, and federal, state and local council funding sources.

The database is tailored specifically to the needs of schools and other educational providers. Subscribers to the Tender Bridge have a single point of access to information and resources about a wide range of funding opportunities for schools or schools in partnership with others.

In 2008, I conducted a scoping study to ascertain whether there really was a need for education specific services in this area. People were asked about



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their current practices in this area and what they perceived were key barriers to seeking and using additional funding opportunities.

Amongst its findings, the scoping study identified that:

1. More funds could be going into more schools. Additional funding opportunities are out there, but for various reasons, such as time and capacity, school leaders' approaches to seeking and using funds are at best patchy.
2. Not all funding information is relevant to schools or educational in focus.
3. No organisation currently tailors all the possible grant information for schools or schools in partnership with others.
4. Two key disincentives for school leaders are the time it takes to identify funding options; and

seeking and weighing up whether it is worth putting in for a grant.

5. School leaders take into account various factors when deciding whether to put in for a fund. These include the stress involved; the total grant amount versus the number of words to be written for a submission; relevance to school priorities; and who will actually do the work.

The principle underpinning the development of the Tender Bridge is the importance of bringing schools and funds together. The Tender Bridge aims to allow any school leader to have more equitable opportunities to find and apply for funds, not just those who already have the skills, knowledge, resources and networks.

Schools are in the best position to know the needs of their students and their community, and the Tender Bridge makes it easier for school leaders to find funds to match the values and

priorities of the school and the future direction it wishes to take.

In addition to the funding database, the Tender Bridge service includes a range of different learning materials to assist subscribers to improve their knowledge and skills in areas such as philanthropic funding eligibility requirements, writing for successful grant seeking and research into the role of corporate and philanthropic sectors in school education.

The Tender Bridge will also run a series of one-day workshops on developing plans and preparing funding submissions, understanding eligibility requirements, and forging partnerships with other organisations. The workshops will commence in February 2010 and run in several states.

For more information or to subscribe, visit  
<<http://tenderbridge.acer.edu.au>> ■